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ABSTRACT

This report describes a model for improving retention and graduation rates of culturally diverse students that involves a guided studies seminar in psychological education. The objective is to provide incoming freshmen with an experiential seminar structured around examining higher education, learning and study skills development, and personal and social adjustment at college. A focus on United States higher education systems provides the freshman a perspective for goal-setting, expectations, and leadership development. The seminar consists of a semester-long survey of topics in psychology and education. Educational modules focusing on specific skills are used. Class experiences emphasize the use of the Deliberate Psychological Education (DPE) method. The model is a variation of the South Carolina "University 101" program combined with the DPE methodology. Small group discussion and high student participation, as well as emphasis on counseling and guidance, are deliberate attempts to match the cognitive style of students. Counselors and educators may use this program to facilitate psychological growth along both cognitive and non-cognitive dimensions. In addition to minority group students, first-generation college students and nontraditional students are targeted. Appended are a couse syllabus, an outline of the scope of the activities, and a four-page bibliography. (SW)

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PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL STUDIES

A FRESHMAN GUIDED STUDIES SEMINAR

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ABSTRACT

Retention of students is one of the most important issues facing postsecondary institutions today. This project presents a model for implementing an intervention strategy aimed at improving retention and graduation rates of culturally diverse students. A guided studies seminar in psychological education is implemented with the purpose of utilizing a highly structured educational program whose primary objective is facilitating the successful matriculation of these students in postsecondary settings. This model offers a framework for counselors and educators working with these students.

In addition to the model, a class experience is outlined appropriate for instructing an educational program that emphasizes use of the Deliberate Psychological Education (DPE) method. Counselors and educators may use this program in facilitating psychological growth and maturity along non-cognitive dimensions as well as promoting positive academic achievement within the cognitive realm. In terms of effective educational outcomes, this program in psychoeducational studies promotes the idea of primary prevention as a prominent factor in the success and retention of students in postsecondary institutions.

PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL STUDIES

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A statement of purpose

This program is intended to provide in-coming freshmen with an experiential seminar structured around examining higher education. This guided studies seminar is designed and adapted specifically for first-year students entering postsecondary institutions. The purpose of this program is to provide these students with a realistic and comprehensive overview of higher education, enhance learning and study skills development, and aid in the successful personal and social adjustment of these students to college life.

The rationale for implementing this guided studies program is centered around improving retention rates of students. Research on student attrition clearly indicates that the freshman year experience is the most critical one for student success. Recent statistics (Noel; et al., 1985) indicate that we will generally lose an average of one-third (i.e. 33%) of the freshmen class from all types of postsecondary institutions in a given year. For some specific target populations the attrition rate is substantially higher. Therefore, a stated goal of this guided studies seminar is to provide a high structure learning environment and on-going orientation program which maintains first-year students on an achievement oriented path.

Freshmen guided studies programs are intervention strategies that have had a proven record of success at various postsecondary institutions. The model which is presented here is a variation of the South Carolina "University 101" program combined with the Deliberate Psychological Education (DPE) methodology. Its practical application and structural sequence is presented in this proposal.

Course overview

A principal objective of this seminar will be to prepare students to meet the challenge of college-level academics. Major emphasis will be placed on developing and enhancing students' research, writing, and learning skills. Also, emphasis will be focused on students' comprehension of higher education in the United States as well as activities and exercises which promote their successful adjustment to the collegiate environment.

There will be three basic content areas highlighted in the seminar, these will consist of:

1. Assisting students in developing proper study habits along with the skills and motivation necessary for achievement in postsecondary education.

2. Presenting major concepts and theories in psychological education (i.e., psychology and education) and human development with a decided emphasis on personal and social adjustment, self-assessment, and college survival skills.

Course overview cont.,

3. Focusing on higher education systems in the United States; this will emphasize bringing the college and university system into proper perspective for the freshman student in terms of goal-setting, expectations, and leadership development.

This particular freshman guided studies seminar is not designed nor intended to be remedial in its orientation. This is an accelerated program designed to give first-year students a "crash course" on how to be successful in college. Psychological education has its foundations in developmental education, thus, this seminar is intended to augment courses already offered through a basic skills educational curriculum. It is not the objective to "teach" reading or mathematics skill building in such a program. However, regularly admitted, high achieving, "high risk", or "low academic achieving" students may select, and ultimately benefit by enrolling in the seminar. Research (Cross; 1974, 1979) indicates that most students derive tremendous benefits from highly structured educational environments. This guided studies program provides such a vehicle for student achievement.

The instructor will also have the added advantage of diagnosing academic deficiencies in first-year student clientele. The instructor should then be able to make the appropriate referrals for tutorial assistance and recommend appropriate basic skills courses (e.g., reading development, etc.). First-year students across all academic levels are therefore encouraged to enroll in the seminar.

Course Structure

This seminar consists of a semester-long survey of topics in psychology and education. The seminar should optimally be offered for three (3) credit hours. The class should meet for one-hour three times per week; or may be offered twice weekly for one-and-one-half hours. Academic work load and requirements will be demanding, but within realistic parameters for first-year students. This seminar should be scheduled in addition to a typical twelve credit hour freshman course load.

The seminar is divided into three learning sets. Learning sets consist of self-contained educational modules that focus on specific kinds of skill building activities. For example, learning set one focuses on personal adjustment to college life and orienting students to higher education. Learning set two emphasizes learning and study skills development, while learning set three highlights human development and activities structured around group (i.e., psychology) experience.

Examinations should be given at the completion of learning sets one and two. These exams will cover all assigned readings, in-and-out of class assignments, and vocabulary assessments. Students are also required to write a four-to-five page research paper. The objective of this assignment is to build on research and writing skills development.

Course structure cont.

Specific behavioral objectives within this seminar will focus on the following developmental tasks:

1. Students will be given lists of vocabulary which correspond to the ideas, concepts, and terminology utilized within that particular learning set. Students will be expected to define and write the meanings of the words. These vocabulary assessments will be collected and graded.

2. Students are required to maintain a personal journal consisting of a survey of their freshman-year (i.e., first semester) experience. There are two objectives for this exercise; first, this exercise should assist the student in organizing their thoughts on personal adjustment and their reactions to college life as well as their reactions to the course; and secondly, this assignment will help build proper note-taking skills. Journals will be graded based on evaluation of clarity, conscientiousness, and overall grammatical structure.

Students are to receive a letter grade from the seminar based on the total number of points accrued via class requirements and assignments. The established standard will be 800 possible points. The letter grade will be awarded on a percentage basis (e.g., 720/800 equals 90% or "A" grade, etc.). The final grade will be cumulative based on all work completed in learning sets one through three. Standards of academic excellence for the course should be maintained at a high level with emphasis on achievement at the mastery level (Block, 1975, Sprinthall & Mosher, 1971, Cross, 1979).

Educational methodology

The instructional methodology utilized in this seminar is based on Deliberate Psychological Education (DPE); (Sprinthall, 1971, 1974, Mosher, 1971, Exum, 1980). Fundamentally, Deliberate Psychological Education involves "learning psychology by doing psychology". The purpose behind utilizing this method is based on the premise that students comprehend and learn subject matter best by practicing and applying the skills they are taught. Psychological education is intended to be both educative and developmental in nature. There is a deliberate attempt to promote psychological growth and maturity in students while building on academic skills.

Structurally, DPE instructional methodology is best utilized in seminar-type classroom settings. The emphasis in the seminar is on relationship building and small group learning activities. Small group discussion and high student participation in the seminar, as well as emphasis on counseling and guidance, are deliberate attempts to match the cognitive styles of the students and, eventually, to increase their ability to function well in a variety of learning environments.

An instructional strategy for the seminar might consist of the following: (with three fifty minute class periods per week) the first session should consist of a lecture that focuses on that section's learning objectives and materials; session two should consist of follow-up and practice session (e.g., readings, etc.) on the

previous lecture's objectives; and session three might involve small group discussion via the laboratory learning experience. For every skill building activity (e.g., listening and note-taking) there is a deliberate structured experience appropriate for that learning objective. The purpose of this instructional sequencing is to help the student comprehend more fully the subject matter while permitting the instructor to more accurately assess each student's achievement development through formative and summative evaluation (Bloom & Madaus, 1971). Any lecture topic may be abbreviated or extended at the descretion of the instructor.

This particular type of guided studies seminar is intended to accommodate fifteen-to-twenty students in each class. It is not recommended to exceed this number unless teaching assistants or a "team teaching" format is utilized. The objective is to have students in a comfortable enough environment to elicit their responses in an evocative manner and promote a positive interactive communication between instructor and students. There are various other "College 101" models designed to accommodate larger numbers of students (Von Frank, 1985).

Service delivery systems

This seminar is intended to serve the educational needs of culturally diverse students attending postsecondary institutions. Culturally diverse students may be defined as black students, hispanic, asian, ethnic minority or "other race" populations. Catagorically, culturally diverse student populations also include first-generation college students, caucasion students from work-class backgrounds, non-traditional or adult and returning students, and "the high ability sons and daughters of blue-collar workers" (Cross: 1974, 1979). The factor that all of these students usually share in common is their high level of financial need. Many of these students are served by colleges and universities through the Educational Opportunity Programs.

For the culturally diverse student, the collegiate environment is usually more foreign in nature. As a consequence of these factors, these students generally will require more personal, social, and academic adjustment to college life. An express purpose of the guided studies program is to provide a highly structured educational environment wherein these first-year students are afforded the guidance and counseling necessary for their successful matriculation in postsecondary settings.

The culturally diverse student generally exhibits characteristics in learning and behavioral style that will require more structure and guidance within the educational milieu (Bruner; 1962, 1966, Cross; 1974, 1979, 1982, Exum; 1979). Educational programs that place emphasis on high structure in learning situations as well as individulaized instruction are usually more beneficial to these students.

Implications for research and further study

The rationale for implementing a freshman guided studies program is to promote successful educational outcomes among first-year students. The emphasis is on academic achievement, developing self-motivation, self-assessment, and positively impacting student persistence and retention. This program provides for these factors of success by way of primary interventions. Primary intervention is based on the educational philosophy of primary prevention. Primary prevention refers to "circumventing student problems in learning and achievement by facilitating psychological growth and maturity and promoting psychological health" (Sprinthall; 1974). It is essentially a pro-active educational strategy aimed at providing high structure educational support systems and retention programs for students most likely to benefit from them. Sprinthall (1974) and others suggest that psychological education is effective with, and appropriate for, all students.

A one-year follow-up evaluation

The initial guided studies seminar in psychological education was implemented during the first term of the 1985-86 academic year. Thirteen first-year students were enrolled in the seminar. This pilot program was targeted for students who were enrolled through the University's Educational Opportunity Program. All of the initial participants were minority students. Academically, the selection of students covered a wide range of educational preparation for college.

During the 85-86 school year fifty-one new minority students were enrolled in the freshman class. Thirteen of these students selected the seminar at the recommendation of the campus' advising center. These thirteen students were a representative subsample of the total group of new minority freshmen and represents approximately 26% of all new minority students enrolled that year. For purposes of this evaluative assessment, the thirteen participants in the seminar were considered the experimental group, and are also included as a part of the total number (51), (i.e., control group) of minority freshmen.

At the end of the first semester the thirteen students who participated in the guided studies program achieved a mean grade point average (G.P.A.) of 2.5775 on a four-point scale. The median g.p.a. for this group was 2.628/4.0. The average number of credits earned by the experimental group was thirteen (13) that semester. One student within the experimental group earned a cumulative grade point average below 2.0/4.0 scale, while one participant achieved a g.p.a. well above 3.0/4.0 scale. The modal score for the experimental group on grade point average was 2.714.

Among all minority freshmen (i.e., N=51) the mean grade point average after the first semester was 1.9871 on a four-point scale. However, the range within the control group is much greater and the median value (i.e., g.p.a.) of 2.20 serves as a

more accurate measure for the total group. An average of twelve (12) credit hours was earned by all minority freshmen following semester one.

A confounding variable in this study is that all minority freshmen are involved in some manner in the campus' overall retention project. However, the results of the program clearly indicate that there was a significant difference in the overall achievement level of those students who participated in the guided studies program versus those who did not. The difference in the obtained mean grade point averages and median values is significant at the .01 level of significance (t-Test statistic). The results indicate that the seminar participants have gotten themselves off to a better academic start in college than the non-participants. The strategy of primary intervention can be a prominent factor in success and achievement of similar types of students entering postsecondary institutions. This guided studies program in psychological education provided such a vehicle for the success of these students.

Summary

The conclusions for which this study suggests is that the guided studies seminar for first-year students be continued as well as expanded to include any first-year students who wish to participate in such a program. This course has proved to be an extremely valuable addition to the basic skills and retention programs at the two-year campus.

In terms of course evaluation, the suggestions and recommendations of the student-participants were given strong consideration. The majority of the participants felt positive about their experience in the seminar. All students felt that this type of course should be available for future freshmen classes. Student evaluations also supported the idea of mandatory class attendance, and they approved of the concept of each person working toward one's own level of academic achievement by way of the point (i.e., grading) system. Students could also receive extra-credit by attending out-of-class programs and campus lectures. The consensus among students was that these types of activities were very beneficial toward their learning, growth, and development as undergraduate students.

The participants in the pilot program felt that particular subject matter be emphasized more strongly. For example, students felt that more time should be allotted to the learning and study skills learning set. Specifically, students suggested that the visit to the campus' library was very important and recommended that this activity take place earlier in the seminar/semester. Next year's program accommodates such changes.

Both students and instructor were unanimous in the opinion that the freshman guided studies seminar be offered for three college credit hours. The work load is extensive; the students are required to complete a research paper; and, are required to do a class project. The additional classroom hour is deemed necessary in order to obtain a more thorough and comprehensive overview and integration of specific learning objectives (e.g. research and writing skills development).

In regard to research potential, future evaluative and longitudinal studies will be conducted on the effectiveness of the program. For instance, we will try and assess the short-term impact of the program by following up on the first-year grades and persistence of the participants in the pilot, and ensuing programs. Also, all students who participate in this program will be monitored and tracked throughout their undergraduate careers in order to assess their continued achievement development as well the effectiveness of this program.

In conclusion, it is generally agreed among educators that the freshman year experience in postsecondary institutions is critical to the success of students. As an intervention strategy, the freshman guided studies program directs primary resources at students and their developmental needs while aiding postsecondary institutions in their retention and enrollment efforts.

APPENDIX A

PRECIS; The Text Used: *Gardner, J. and Jewler, J. College Is Only The Beginning: A Student Guide to Higher Education*

Introduction; A Statement of Purpose

Session I — Overview course requirements and objectives
Administer Cornell Learning and Study Skills Inventory
Assigned Reading(s)
From the text; Chapter 1

LEARNING SET ONE

Section I — Demystifying the University
From the text; Chapters 2, 19
Session 2: "Getting Started"

Section II — Managing Your Time
Supplemental text; (Pauk) Chapter 3

Section III — Overview of Communication Skills
From the text; Chapter 12
1. Techniques of Effective Study
From the text; Chapter 5

Section IV — Listening and Note-Taking
Supplemental text; (Pauk) Chapter 6

CONCEPT EXAM ONE

Journal Review and Vocabulary Assessment due

LEARNING SET TWO

Section V — Structure of Learning
1. Cognitive Styles: Strategies for Learning and Achievement
From the text; Chapter 6
2. Teaching Styles: Decoding the Instructor
From the text; Chapter 3

Section VI — Testing Strategies; Studying for Exams
From the text; Chapter 13

Section VII — Research Methods
1. Reference Skills - Learning To Use Your Campus Library
(presentation by the library staff)
From the text; Chapter 4
Research Papers Due

CONCEPT EXAM TWO

Journal Review and Vocabulary Assessment due

LEARNING SET THREE

Section VIII — Human Development
From the text; Chapter 11

Section IX — Personal Growth and Development
From the text; Chapters 10, 14

Section X — The College Student
From the text; Chapter 22

CLASS PROJECTS: "Identity Poster" Due - Student Presentations (Final Exam)

JOURNAL REVIEWS

COURSE EVALUATIONS

Supplemental Text: *Pauk, Walter How to study in college. (3 ed.) Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co. 1984.*

APPENDIX B

PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL STUDIES MODEL

Introduction: A Statement of Purpose

In this meeting students are acquainted with course structure, requirements, and objectives. Groundwork and expectations for the seminar are set. Course syllabus is reviewed and students are given assigned readings.

Higher Education in America: Demystifying the University

This seminar overviews the University along with its mission, purpose, and structural components. This section also addresses the transition step between secondary and postsecondary education. Students are encouraged to discuss their views on what college means to them, along with its myths and realities.

Structured Experience #1: Students are required to interview a member of the campus faculty, staff, or an upperclass student with the question, "What does it take for a student to graduate from this University?" Reports will become part of the next class discussion.

This part of the seminar presents a Laboratory Learning Experience where students are introduced to the collegiate environs from a non-cognitive perspective. The concepts of alienation, isolation, personal adjustment, and self-defeating behaviors are discussed. The campus environment is brought into focus and the ideas of environmental press, milieu management, and a "sense of belonging" are explored.

Film: Getting Started; Student Achievement through Self-Management (ETS).

Structured Experience #2: "A Developmental Case Study"

Organizing for Success: Managing Your Time

This seminar addresses itself to the idea of time management. The purpose of the session is to help students develop an effective means of organizing their lives within the campus eco-system. Concepts of self-discipline, developing proper study habits, planning, and goal setting are discussed. Students are introduced to the Campus Learning Development Center and other academic resources. A small group discussion will follow film and students will construct personal study plans.

Film: "The Time of Life"

The "Three R's" Revisited: Overview of Communication Skills

This seminar addresses itself to reexamining four areas vital to effective communication--reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Students are given various exercises and drills which facilitate building, augmenting, and refining these skills. The concepts of verbal and non-verbal communications will be highlighted. Students are presented with a general model for building effective study habits. The SQ3R method for getting the most out of college textbooks is highlighted.

Structured Experience: "The Puzzle?" (non-verbal)

Using Your Skills: Listening and Note-Taking

The concept of effective listening is strongly promoted. Auditory skill building, focusing and concentration along with paraphrasing techniques are presented. Specific techniques for outlining, notetaking, and rewriting classroom information is highlighted. Getting the most out of the classroom experience is the focus. Skill building will also involve extracting main ideas, summarizing material, and recognizing digressions in classroom lectures. Students are required to use "new skills" for journal entries.

Structured Experience: Values Clarification (Paraphrasing exercises-Auditory)

Logic and Reasoning: The Structure of Learning

This discussion focuses on learning and cognition and how it impacts student achievement. Students are introduced to the logic of learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. K. Patricia Cross is introduced along with various theories on cognitive styles. The idea of behavioral style is also discussed. Exercises and experiments which determine student learning characteristics are examined.

Part two of this section will focus on student awareness, participation, and success in the classroom environment. Emphasis will be on mneumonic techniques, proper in-classroom behaviors, class attendance, and "de-coding the instructor." Didactive and evocative modes of teaching are discussed.

Structured Experience: "Critique an Instructor"

Testing Strategies: Studying For Exams

This section focuses on the types of testing formats used in assessing achievement in college. Styles and strategies for attacking essay tests, take home exams, true-false formats, quizzes, and particularly multiple choice exams are discussed. Test anxiety and relaxation techniques are introduced. Learning skills strategies for dealing with exam prediction and effective study are highlighted. This lecturette should always precede mid-semester exams.

Structured Experience: Relaxation and Stress Reduction

Using Your Library: Research Methods

Session one involves a visit to the campus library and a presentation by library staff. Students are encouraged to build good referencing skills by viewing the campus library as "user friendly." Students are introduced to computerized information retrieval systems.

Structured Experience: Learning To Use The LIAS System

Session two involves presenting a general overview of research techniques. The standard research method and the "science of muddling through" are highlighted. Students are informed as to how to select a research topic and developing library research skills. Topics related to compiling bibliographies, documentation, and plagarism are discussed.

Structured Experience: Visit To The Campus Writing Center

Search for Self: Human Development

The idea of life-span development is the focus. Concepts such as self-esteem, self-appraisal, and self-concept are discussed. The psychosocial theories of Erikson are presented as a general model. The Cross hypothesis on black personality and identity development is presented. A presentation or discussion on human sexuality is appropriate. Concepts such as the Johari Window and Transactional Analysis are presented. This seminar introduces students to structured group (psychotherapeutic) experience. All class meetings should be conducted within the structured framework of group or a laboratory learning environment.

Structured Experiences: Shield of Life - The Peak Experience Exercise

Film: Human Relations; A Tale of "O"

Career Decisions: Making a Vocational Choice

The World-of-Work is introduced in this section. Career choice and life-stage career development is discussed. Students are presented with concepts occupational choice and general career information resources. The ACT Viesa Self-Directed Career Guidebook is utilized. Also, students can be administered various occupational interest surveys such as the Strong-Campbell SCVII, and Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Topics such as worker trait group theory, occupational outlooks, and choice of college major are highlighted. The work of John L. Holland and Donald E. Super are discussed. This section is particulary appropriate for bringing in a guest speaker from the Work-A-Day World.

Film: TBA "World of Work"

Structured Experience: Learning Project Discover

New Directions: The College Student

This discussion ties it all together and focuses on the student as a "whole person." Theories in student development which focus on college impact are discussed. Arthur Chickering, Nevitt Sanford, Fredrick Coons, Robert L. Williams, and others are highlighted.

Project: "An Identity Poster" (student presentations)

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